Letter no. 62. Wednesday 23 July.

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6 Palestine Coy. The Buffs
Middle East forces.

My own darling –

Here I am starting a letter to you, but I am in a shocking mood, I can only hope that I shall feel better as I go along. The trouble is that the Brigadier paid a visit today to the barracks & proceeded to be extremely displeased with everything he saw. He is absolutely up to his eyes, still, in peace time ideas of spit & polish, & appeals far too much, but the infuriating part was that he was right, up to a point, & the cookhouse in particular, & other parts too were pretty filthy. But what he refused to understand was that I am doing my blasted best to run this place with a few Jews, who have no authority at all over the hundreds of British troops who are attached to me, whereas normally, this barracks is occupied & run by a complete Infantry Battalion. And it was only last week that I had an interview with him & pointed out that my men were overworked & that the work itself was suffering. He was most sympathetic & asked me to put it all down in writing for him to see the G.O.C. His best remark to me today was "Now, don't make any excuses, Massey, or you will go down in my estimation; but get things right." Well, that does not give one much scope for very much more to be said. And he is about 5'-4" high. Well, if he wants peace time stuff, he shall have it – plenty of whitewash, brass door knobs brassed up, tables scrubbed white with caustic soda – but it is a damned nuisance.

Thursday 22nd July. There was no peace for me yesterday – it was 10.0 o'clock when I finished working & began to write to you – & at 10.30 I had a telephone call, which kept me working for another hour. Today, I have been at work from 7.0 this morning, until 6.0 o'clock. And at 8.30, the Sgts are giving a smoking concert, to which I, & my officers, have been bidden. It is really remarkable, the way my time passes, & the odd collection of jobs & events which go to make up my day. It seems a funny way for me to be helping to win the war, & to have come all this way, away from you, just to do this. I simply cannot avoid feeling fed up & disgusted at times, having thought of myself for some time now, as being reasonably tough. And so far I haven't even seen a German, or a dead man of any kind. But I suppose somebody has to do this job, & I have promised you before that I will never take any active steps to get into the fighting. And it all has the enormous compensation of practically ensuring the certainty of my return to you, complete & unharmed. But I sometimes ask myself am I man or mouse, I hope you never do, my darling. It would have been so easy yesterday to have told that short arsed little runt of a Brigadier that I had not come out here & left my wife, just to keep a barracks clean, & supervise draining up a cookhouse, & nor was I particularly interested in it.

Talking of being tough, my blasted tendons Achilles, have gone again, on account of this PT. The one which was operated on, slightly, & the other one, much more

which is a big nuisance - rather gives the lie to these silly doctors who talk about imagination. I'm afraid I am too enthusiastic on R.I. & put too much effort into it, & when they get better again, I shall have to take it out a little more gently. Do you remember that rather unhappy week in the hospital - followed by an extremely grimy week at Patties - & then another goodbye on Preston Castle station. It was strange, the way last summer split itself up into sections. And I can easily remember some of the dates exactly, the others pretty near. On April 23, the Bn went to Dutton Park - & you arrived about May 1st. On June 2nd, the Bn went to Liverpool, & I managed to spin out my job on the rear party for another week. I was a week in Liverpool, & then 2 weeks in hospital at Tarporley. And then on July 10th the Bn went to N. Ireland, & you came over within another 10 days. And do you remember when that sanpess matron wanted not allow me to leave hospital & you rang the doctor & said you had the Adjutant's permission, & then rang Muriel, & spoke to Harry Birch & said you had the doctors' permission. What a contrast, between another week ~~on the west~~ in that place, in a bed in which you & I can never be happy - & away together at Patties.

I'm afraid, very afraid, that you are right about my hair, darling - it has gone back a bit from the forehead. One or two more scraps which I have to send you, seem to show it, & on a more careful examination of myself, & holding my head in a

certain way & at a certain angle, it shows bright. I still have any amount of hair & it is always growing very rapidly - except in this one place. But really there is nothing more can do about it - I wash & oil, & oil & wash, & rub & massage. It's not really too bad to know - & I do hope you will not be very fed up. It will probably stay as it is for years now. I will not relax the treatment you have prescribed, & will oil & wash & rub more & more!

I must now go & change & have supper, & then go & drink a toll of a lot in the Sgts' Mess.

Goodnight, sweetest. xxxxx

Friday - July 25th. Last night's Sgts' Mess party was really fine - rare. It was all caused by the fact that they have had a lot of Royal Navy Petty Officers, Coxswains, & so on, in the Mess for some weeks, these being off a destroyer which was very badly damaged in the Syrian business. The ship is off again tomorrow & this was a farewell party to these R.N. people. As you know, my own Sgts' are very few, C.S.M. Jack, C.Q.M.S. Hemmings, & Sgt. Griffiths & Kitley, & the Jewish ones, who hardly spend any money at all in their own mess, partly because they do not drink much, but mostly because they prefer to hang on to their money. But with these R.N. & also a gang of Marine Sgts who are in the mess too, the total strength is about 85. And the Sgts' Mess profit for the quarter was over £50. So the C.S.M. proposed this party, & to spend £20, & I, of course, approved. The C.S.M. made a very good, but very sentimental speech; the R.N.

chief petty officer made a short reply — at the end, I briefly said thankyou very much on behalf of the officers. The Navy provided a band, piano, drums, trumpet. There were many songs, & a number of really first class turns by various people. I drank all kinds whiskies & beer from 8-30 until 11-30. I was solidly engaged in conversation the whole time. There was an excellent spirit, everybody was drunk to a greater or lesser degree, it was all extremely pleasant, & rather reminded me of the Sgts dance at Warrenpoint, do you remember? The only incident reported to me this morning, seems to have been with my Sgt Instructor, who as I have told you is a bit shy & girlish, especially for a Sgt. Some weeks ago, one navy chap told him that if only he could cook, he would marry him. Well, last night, Instructor got really drunk, probably for the first time, & an enormous bloody great petty officer made a concentrated pass at him. Instructor was far too far gone to know what was going on, & allowed himself to be cuddled & embraced. Finally, Hemmings decided to intervene & preserve his purity, upon which the P.O. said "oh, he's yours, is he" — so Hemmings took the line of least resistance & said yes he was, took the bewildered Instructor away, put him to bed. He looked very green & sorry for himself this morning, & in a complete dream, I had to tell him to pull

himself together. After which, I had 3 aspirins & a large mug of hot tea, myself.
later on in the morning, I took Solomon, Pillatt & Moscardi along, & we made a call on the Captain of the destroyer, on his ship. This was very interesting, because it was the first time I have been on board a destroyer, & still more interesting, because the survival of this ship was a miracle & will most likely go down in naval history. She was dive bombed off Syria, & received a number of near misses, which lifted her almost clean out of the water, nearly broke her in two, burst her oil tanks, which flooded the entire ship, & put her 16 feet down by the bows, so that she was nearly under water in front - & yet she came back into port under her own steam. The total casualties were - one leg broken. The Captain was frightfully interesting & amusing, & had previously been in command of the Dover patrol earlier in the war, & had taken both the King & W. Churchill over to France. The King, he said was very pleasant indeed & easy to talk to. He had said something about pheasant shooting & one of the officers said, how lucky to be able to, to which His Majesty replied - Why the hell shouldn't I have a day's shooting - I work as hard as you do". The Captain is going to come & call on me before lunch tomorrow - they are really frightfully social those Navy people, & it is all very pleasant, I think. I think they all make a system

of it, really — with being at sea for long stretches at a time, they must feel like getting out & among a few new faces, & when they arrive in a strange port, they just set out at once & call on people.

I'm sending you some more snaps, darling — they are all just of, except one, where Ben-Ami is getting mad to me. The undressed ones are down by the sea, in front of barracks, the ones with clothes on, are taken in front of my quarters. You will notice how stiff & boardy my shorts are — that is the system out here, starched to the greatest possible. In another I am getting my topee ready, but the one taken with it on did not come out — but I never wear the thing anyway — I look silly, it is uncomfortable, & they are said to encourage baldness.

I wonder how much they charge you for enlargements — here, they charge about 4½, to about the size of an envelope. I hope you are making good use of your mai camera, & that I shall get a regular supply of snaps of you, & Maxie — though I don't suppose he will have very many expressions as yet.

I seem to be thinking about you more & more & more, my darling. Yesterday afternoon, I was by myself on the shore, sunbathing, in my skin & lying on a towel — my thoughts of you were marvellously vivid — & extremely passionate, my sweetheart. I had to turn over on my knees & stay there! All sorts of gorgeous new ways of making love came to my

mind. But it does not need much thought to think of new ways of making love to you. You are so wonderful & lovely, that every time we make love it is new & exciting. There is never any knowing just what will happen. Our love life has been & is various, hasn't it, darling — & it seems, has become more exciting & satisfying all the time — & when I left you last October was more to me than before we were married & when we were first married. How I long for this unnatural existence to end, & for our life to begin again. Because I think of you so much & so dearly — it makes me wonder if I seem to have been so many occasions when our minds have been working together, when thoughts have come & compelling. The thought of actually seeing you & touching you & holding you again, is almost too much to bear. It will be an exhilarating bliss too. I hope you think hard too. Between us, we might achieve something.

Now this must stop.

All my dearest, deepest love to you.

To Max my own darling, your Nancy. XXXX

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Mrs. H. Massay.

Corseland.

Pillory Hill

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H. Massay.